OUT & About

The Pacific Region Outreach Newsletter

Theme: Public Participation

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Upcoming Themes:
Fall — Indigenous People
Winter — Grants
Spring — Public Use
Summer — Water

Wolf Outreach in Idaho

"It's not a biological issue, it's a social issue"

By Ted Koch and Meggan Laxalt

Five years after reintroduction, Idaho wolves are rebounding and many recovery goals are being met.

But it seems that as wolf populations increase, so do tensions in Idaho. Livestock producers are angry about cattle and sheep attacks, some of which have resulted in costly fatal losses. Urbanites are increasingly concerned about their pets as they glimpse wolves closer to home. Environmental groups are disappointed with the Service's decisions to remove wolves due to depredation incidents near the East Fork of the Salmon River. And public officials are often outspoken critics regarding wolf issues.

Wolf recovery presents unique challenges to the Service and its partner, the Nez Perce Tribe. With such diverse opinions spanning the state, wolf outreach has become a customer-service oriented, "on-call" job, often extending into evenings and weekends.

Roy Heberger, Idaho's former wolf recovery coordinator, who recently retired from the Service, sums it up this way: "I don't see wolf recovery as a biological challenge at all. As long as people tolerate wolves, we're going to make it. What's going to be the real challenge are the social capacities.

See **WOLF** ... *Page 6*

Photo by: USFWS

Outreach plays a major role in Idaho's wolf recovery program.

Getting the Public Involved

FWS retiree shows how a cup of "jo" can build relationships

By Sandy Wilbur

I spent over 30 years working for the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, including working with the National Wildlife Refuge System, overseeing Region 1's endangered species program, preparing a recovery plan for the imperilled California condor, and coordinating Wilderness Act studies on a number of Pacific Region refuges.

I learned a lot during those years about natural resources, wildlife, and the land. As you might imagine, I also developed some definite philosophies and opinions about public participation in the agency decision-making process.

Support the concept. If your only reasons for seeking public involvement are because it is required, and/or it will help you get what you want, then don't spend a lot of time with the public. Do the minimum and take the flak. Besides, you'll be carrying on a long tradition of government arrogance so you'll give the local folks the pleasure of being able to say that "we knew all along that the government didn't care what we thought."

On the other hand, there are some things you can do if you believe or would like to believe that:

See **PARTICIPATION** ... *Page 12*

Out & About

Out & About is published quarterly for Region 1 Fish and Wildlife Service employees.

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SUBMISSIONS
We welcome your submissions to **Out & About.** Regular sections in the newsletter are:
- Feature Articles
- Case Studies
- Outreach Accomplishments
- Trainings & Workshops
- Announcements
- Q & A
- Letters to the Editor
- Outreach Resources

Articles should be submitted by E-mail or 3-1/2 inch floppy and run 150 to 500 words. Gear writing to newsletter style; avoid technical jargon. Photos welcome. Publication is not guaranteed, though every effort will be made to use submissions.

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SUBMISSION DEADLINES

Spring	April 1
Summer	May 15
Fall	August 15
Winter	November 15

Out & About has received U.S. Department of the Interior and Fish and Wildlife Service DI-550 approval.

REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Encouraging Public Participation

An interview with the new Deputy Regional Director, Rowan Gould

By Jeanne Clark

You've just joined the Pacific Region. Can you tell us about yourself? Like many Service employees I've moved to many duty stations, but now feel I've come home. I can almost see the roof of the Portland elementary school I attended years ago. I received my Bachelors and Masters degrees, as well as my PhD. in fish pathology and fish biology, from Oregon State University. Following several research jobs around the country and assistant regional director jobs for programs in Alaska, I moved to Washington, D.C. and served as deputy assistant director for fisheries just prior to my return to the Northwest. Northwest issues and the subject of public participation seem to go hand in hand.

What role does public participation play in Service issues? There's no question that public participation plays a profound role in what we do, not just because of the laws and policies that govern our jobs, but because public participation is a necessary element of the Service's ecosystem approach to natural resource management. For most large issues, especially northwest salmon, California water, and other topics, landscape level approaches recognize and accept multiple ownerships and the valid viewpoints of many interest groups (whether we agree with them or not). We must be inclusive and willing to listen. If we don't, people won't listen to us.

Has public involvement changed in recent years? Yes. I think we're approaching a better understanding of people and processes. This didn't occur because people just became aware of the importance of public participation. Many laws recognize the legitimate and expected participation of a myriad of stakeholders, including the Service's legal authority to be "at the table." By having everyone better informed early on, we can move away from confrontational communication and toward participatory involvement.

How should we deal with negative public reactions to Service decisions? It's okay to agree to disagree, as long as it's done professionally. Informing the public and letting them know that we're interested in their position is key. If we've done our best to keep people informed, if we are honest, if people understand what we're proposing to do, and if it's based on the best science available, we can hold our heads high. People might complain about the outcome, but not about the process.

Can you talk about being reactive versus proactive? Reactive public participation tends to be ineffective. If you don't involve people up front, you're setting yourself up for avoidable controversy. Be proactive! Before you involve others, use a planning strategy to help solidify your thinking. Then follow it!

How can we do a better job of embracing public participation? I know three areas that might help: First, start with an open mind; then try to understand and value other points of view. Before you can work with someone, they must be comfortable that you do not "discount" their perspective. After all, you would want the same courtesy.

Second, as an agency we must come to the table speaking with one voice, not as a group of disparate, uncommunicative programs.

Finally, we need to brush up on our "people" and "negotiating" skills. To embrace public participation, we should take advantage of excellent local and NCTC training opportunities to expand our experience, skill, and confidence in this important arena. O

Rowan Gould is the deputy regional director of the Pacific Region.

Public Participation...

What in the heck is it?

By Tony Faast

Ask folks what "public participation" means and you'll get a lot of answers. We involve our publics when we engage them as volunteers, partner with them on joint projects, work with them planning an event, or talk to them at a state fair booth. This is surely public "involvement," but is it public "participation?"

No, according to folks in the public involvement business, public participation is specific: It refers to giving people a say about government actions that affect their lives.

A popular term for participants in this decision-making process is "stakeholder." This issue of *Out & About* is devoted to looking at how we interact with stakeholders and facilitate their participation.

Whether we're hearing from ex-Service employee, Sandy Wilbur, who encourages all of us to drink more coffee to develop grassroots relationships (page 1), or the Dungeness NWR staff, which spent several years working with a myriad of "publics" on new use policies for the Dungeness Spit (page 5), the message is clear: These stakeholders are passionate about their interests!

Whatever term we use to describe their participation in the decision-making process, the goal is to involve stakeholders before they start nailing protest signs to their stakes and showing up at our public meetings! O

Tony Faast is a staff biologist for the Division of Federal Aid.

"Public participation is giving people a say about government actions that affect their lives."

Centennial Corner

Celebrating a century of conservation

By Susan Saul

March 14, 2003 will mark a milestone in the history of wildlife conservation in America: the centennial of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

When President Theodore Roosevelt set aside tiny Pelican Island on Florida's east coast as a refuge for birds, he initiated a conservation endeavor that now includes 520 refuges, spans 93 million acres, and continues to grow.

A national team has been established to plan the centennial celebration. The team has selected three goals for the centennial: 1) broaden public support and appreciation for the Refuge System; 2) expand partnerships; and 3) strengthen stewardship capability and facilities.

The cornerstones of the centennial celebration are legislation — the Centennial Act — and a series of special outreach projects called the Centennial Campaign.

If passed, the act would establish a Centennial Commission to promote awareness of the Refuge System and to accept donations of money, property, and services. The act would also direct the Service to develop a Centennial Legacy Plan to address priority operations, maintenance, and construction needs.

Through the Centennial Campaign's special outreach efforts, the American public will be invited to discover and enjoy the Refuge System. It includes public awareness products, such as commemorative postage stamps, a special exhibit in the Smithsonian's Museum of Natural History, an IMAX documentary film, exhibits targeting travelers at transportation hotspots, and projects to boost volunteer and partnership programs.

Employees at every field station should begin thinking about how their site can celebrate the centennial, whether it is a local activity or teaming up with a nearby refuge to help with a centennial event. O

Susan Saul is an outreach specialist in External Affairs.

EA PERSPECTIVE

Involving the Public

Believe in it! Do it!

By Rick Coleman

"People want and need to feel they have been consulted and have had their say."

We are a natural resources management agency. Whether the act of management involves figuring out how to grow the most ducks on limited wetland acres or how big to make a proposed critical habitat, the process usually boils down to solving problems. So we're really a problem solving agency!

In the old days many of our problems were uncomplicated, so it was easy to come up with solutions and implement them without much public involvement. We never really learned to consult with or involve the public because it didn't seem necessary. Now, many laws, mandates, and policies guarantee the public "a place at the table." Add in media coverage and outspoken interest groups, and it becomes impossible to solve problems behind closed doors.

Public participation is not just a necessity: It also makes good sense. People want and need to feel they have been consulted and have their say. Being part of the process shapes how they feel about the possible solutions. And their support, or lack of it, clearly affects implementing the solution.

Look at our track record: How many times have we developed a good solution internally but failed to implement it because of a lack of public buy in? It's easy to blame "others" for these failures. Unfortunately, when we do this, we're right on course. "Others" did prevent the implementation. But we orchestrated the failure by not courting their input so we could cultivate their support! If we fail to reflect on this and just shrug off the failure by blaming others, we are perpetuating a dead end cycle for our agency and the public.

We need to manage our public involvement efforts with the same care we give to managing our technical efforts. There are now management processes, procedures, and training opportunities to help us make the public involvement process constructive and even satisfying for all parties. This issue of *Out & About* is chock-full of good ideas for accomplishing this.

Next time you're faced with a decision, take stock of how the public feels. Do they understand? Have you listened and shared enough so they support the solution? Are they talking about the problem you solved — or the solution you prevented? O

Rick Coleman is the chief of External Affairs.

RESOURCES: Displays, Exhibits, and Publications

The Public Meeting Survival Guide
The Natural Resource Planning Survival Guide

These two guides are written in step-by-step workbook style and packed with helpful public involvement tips. Contact Susan Saul, External Affairs, 503/872-2728, or Tony Faast, Federal Aid, 503/231-6128.

How to Have Better Meetings

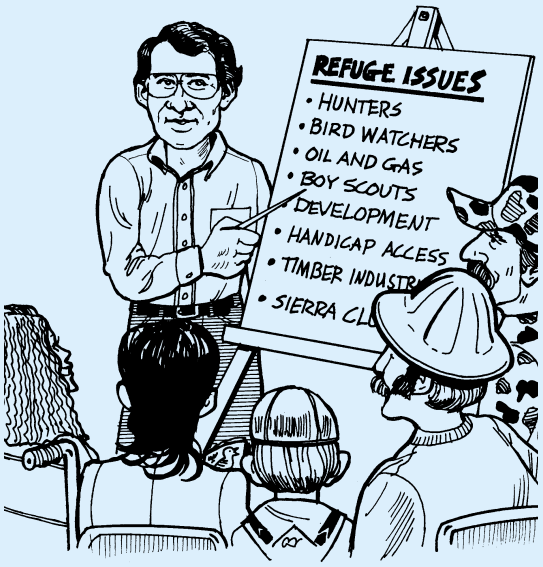
This is a series of tip sheets focusing on public meetings published by Federal Aid's Management Assistance Team. Contact Susan Saul, External Affairs, 503/872-2728.

How to Design a Public Participation Program

This handy publication, prepared by the U.S. Department of Energy, is available from www.em.doe.gov/ftplink/em22/doeguide.pdf

International Association for Public Participation

This organization seeks to promote and improve the practice of public participation. Lots of good resources. Contact them at PO Box 10146, Alexandria VA 22310, (800) 644-4273, or www.pin.org



CASE STUDY

Bringing Back the Birds

Learn how Dungeness NWR tackled public use problems

By Kolleen Irvine

I write this, listening to frothy waves crashing on the sand spit that forms the major land area of Dungeness National Wildlife Refuge. This picturesque 5.5 mile spit backed by scenic views all around has driftwood piles to admire, rocks and water to enjoy, and an historic lighthouse to explore.

These attractions, all located at one of Washington's few beaches with public access, boosted refuge visitor numbers to nearly 115,000 a year. Visitors indulged in a variety of activities, including jogging and walking, sun-bathing and wading, boating and kayaking, "souvenir" collecting and beach-combing, clamming and fishing, and fort-building and rock-throwing. They also brought their dogs, horses, kites, balls, and frisbees!

Not surprisingly, conflicts occurred between wildlife-watchers and recreationists. More importantly, wildlife use on the refuge declined as visitor use increased. It was no longer true, as an "old-timer" told me, that the sky over Dungeness turned black with ducks and geese in spring and fall.

In 1993 the refuge staff began to assess the impact of public activities on the wildlife. They found that 11 public uses were not compatible with the refuge's purpose as a breeding and wintering ground for migratory birds.

A new public use plan based on good science was developed; it involved public scoping meetings, Congressional briefings, open houses, and media and community outreach. The focus of these contacts was to help people understand why refuges exist and why changes in public use were required.

In 1997 the staff selected a compromise alternative that focused on managing the"Big Six" uses (except hunting) and greatly restricted non-wildlife dependent recreation. The final plan established sanctuary areas, required seasonal closures, modified all public uses, and banned jetskiing and windsurfing.

Many of the uses had been occurring with little restriction for years. The new plan looked good on paper, but what was the best way to implement it and enforce the new regulations with limited staff and budget?

Photo by: USFWS

Volunteers meet and greet visitors and explain new regulations.

With assistance from EPIC, the refuge staff developed new signs and a new handout with a map, then embarked on an intense and positive public contact program to carry out the new regulations. Volunteers handed out the maps and explained the regulations at the entrance fee station from 8:00 a.m. until 8:00 p.m. daily. A new refuge officer routinely patrolled the spit and made friendly, "educational" visitor contacts, issuing notices of violation only as a last resort.

After three years, the public response has been mainly positive, thanks to the "meet and greet" program conducted daily by our volunteers and refuge officer.

The compatibility issues that were identified have been resolved. Many community members now understand why refuges exist and how public uses must coexist with these purposes.

Only time will tell whether these changes will have a positive influence on bird numbers so that once again the "ducks and geese blacken the sky over Dungeness." But preliminary bird monitoring efforts are encouraging. O

Kolleen Irvine is a refuge officer at Dungeness NWR.

"The public response has been mainly positive, thanks to our "meet and greet" program…"

Turning Debate into Dialogue

Thinking and speaking in ways that defuse antagonism

By Susan Saul

We live in the "argument culture." It encourages us to approach the world and other people in an adversarial frame of mind. It assumes that opposition is the best way to get anything done.

So contends Deborah Tannen, an acclaimed linguist and professor at Georgetown University. She is the author of *You Just Don't Understand*, the landmark best seller on the differences in the ways men and women communicate, and *The Argument Culture: Moving From Debate to Dialogue*.

Tannen says the noble American traditions of balance, debate, and listening to both sides have been distorted. More and more, our public interactions have become arguments.

In the argument culture, she writes, "the best way to discuss an idea is to set up a debate; the best way to cover news is to find spokespeople who express the most extreme, polarized views and present them as 'both sides'; the best way to settle disputes is litigation that pits one party against another; the best way to begin an essay is to attack someone; and the best way to show you're really thinking is to criticize."

"When debates and fighting predominate," Tannen says, "those who enjoy verbal sparring are likely to take part. Those who aren't comfortable with oppositional discourse are likely to opt out."

If this is the society in which we are trying to conduct public participation in agency decision-making, how should we deal with it?

One of the most effective ways to defuse antagonism is to provide a forum for individuals from opposing groups to get to know each other. This is why we hold open houses, tours, meetings, workshops and other face-to-face events. Refreshments also encourage dialogue — and give people comfort.

Another way to defuse debate is to use language that encourages discussion rather than argument. Tannen suggests that instead of "critique," say "comment;" instead of "fight," say "discussion;" instead of "both sides," say "all sides;" instead of "the other side," say "another side;" instead of "most controversial," say "most important;" instead of "provocative," say "thought-provoking;" instead of "focus on differences", say "search for common ground;" and instead of "win the argument," say "understand another point of view."

Tannen also suggests that we make special efforts not to think in twos. Make a point of comparing three different alternatives that can be considered on their own terms, rather than as opposites. Insist on hearing from "all sides," instead of "both sides."

Our success in fish and wildlife conservation depends on our ability to use public participation to move from the "argument culture" to the "dialogue culture." O

Susan Saul is an outreach specialist in the External Affairs Office.

Upcoming Events

Oregon Shorebird Festival

When: Sept.8-10
Where: North Bend, OR
Contact: Cape Arago Audubon Society
541/267-7208

Washington Water Weeks

When: Sept.10-Oct.15
Where: Statewide
Contact: Washington Dept. of Ecology
360/943-3642

Wenatchee River Salmon Festival

When: Sept.14-17
Where: Leavenworth, WA
Contact: Leavenworth NFH
509/548-6662
www.salmonfest.org

National Hunting and Fishing Day

When: Sept. 23
Where: National
Contact: National Shooting Sports Foundation
203/426-1320

Wolf…

Continued from Page 1

Wolves are going to be limited by human tolerance, not by habitat or food."

So, how does outreach effectively help manage the biological and social aspects of wolf recovery? One concept has been central to the wolf outreach message: Wolves will recover spectacularly as long as we don't illegally kill them. To reduce the incidence of illegal mortality of wolves, the Service, the Nez Perce Tribe, and Wildlife Services have crafted and conducted outreach efforts to reach diverse Idaho audiences. The goal of these efforts has been to build trust and strengthen working relationships across wolf territory.

Over meals, or after-hours, we have discussed natural resource issues with scores of livestock producers and their families. A major focus has been to educate them about the flexibility available under the Endangered Species Act for limiting livestock depredation

See **WOLF …** *Page 7*

Great PR from Garbage!

The Summer 1999 issue of *Out & About* reported that, in 1997, the Sacramento-San Joaquin Estuary Fishery Resource Office in Stockton, California adopted a three-mile stretch of highway and removed trash from it as part of the CalTrans Adopt-a-Highway program.

Last year, 11 employees donated 45 hours to collect 49 bags of litter. For their volunteer efforts, CalTrans recently awarded them Group of the Year - 1999 for their local district, which includes over 600 groups.

"Our group takes pride and gets satisfaction in helping to keep a small part of our community looking nice," said Mark Pierce, who organized the cleanup effort. "It's an outreach effort that really fits well with the spirit of the Service."

An Annual Tradition!

Your Pacific Region outreach newsletter, *Out & About*, has done it again! For the fourth year in a row, the newsletter has won either first (twice) or second place (twice) in the "Internal Communications" category of the Association for Conservation Information's annual publication contest.

The newsletter's recent second place award is valued recognition of our effort to consistently produce a timely, well-designed, and worthwhile publication. Many thanks to the fine authors out there who make time to provide great stories.

To submit an article, check the themes and deadlines listed on pages 1 and 2. Articles do not always need to follow the theme, but they must be related to outreach.

Sometimes this means simply reporting your success in a slightly different light. For instance, *Out & About* wouldn't run an article about how your new waterfowl census numbers have increased. But you could easily share this accomplishment if you focused on the role volunteers (outreach tool) played in seasonal counts.

Keep those stories coming. Become part of a winning tradition!

Wolf…

Continued from Page 6

by wolves, and for removing repeat offenders. We have also tried to be available around the clock to promptly respond to calls regarding wolf depredation problems.

The Service, the Tribe, and Wildlife Services have worked to educate hunters to recognize wolves and avoid shooting them, by hosting talks and distributing wolf/coyote identification posters. We have engaged people with a broad variety of interests in wolves, from those who strongly advocate their protection to those who are just curious.

Electronic and print media interviews occupy much outreach time, as do presentations to local interest groups and schoolchildren; field meetings with ranchers and others; and briefings for public officials.

Finally, we have worked with our partners to minimize the risk of control actions that could injure or kill wolves.

Persistence. Strong people skills. Problem-solving abilities. Bridge-building. Passion. Wolf outreach in Idaho has demanded nothing less than these. This people-oriented approach has allowed the Service to educate the public, not only about wolf biology, but also about human nature. When we find that middle ground where biological and social issues are addressed, we know our recovery program will be truly successful. O

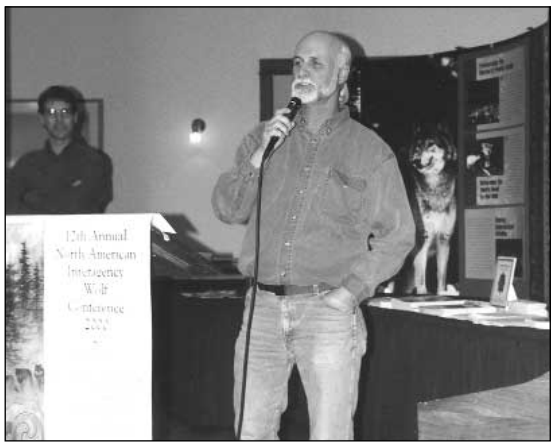


Photo by: USFWS

Roy Heberger gives talk. At left, Curt Mack, Tribal Wolf Recovery Coordinator

Ted Koch is a fish and wildlife biologist and Meggan Laxalt is an outreach specialist at the Snake River Basin Field Office.

And the Winners Are...

Small grants support field level outreach

By Susan Saul and Meggan Laxalt

The first Pacific Region Outreach Small Grants Program is a resounding success. Of the 29 grant proposals submitted, more than half have been funded, totaling nearly $14,000.

The regional External Affairs Program initiated the Outreach Small Grants Program to support field level outreach efforts, particularly at smaller field stations. This funding effort is intended to assist with innovative outreach ideas that are frequently left unfunded in the normal budget process. Special consideration is given to proposals that address the Director's priorities, benefit the entire region or Service, are cross-programmatic, and include matching funds or other partnership commitments.

The selected projects range from purchasing equipment in support of field station education programs to production of videos, CD-ROMs, and exhibits that could benefit a broad region. Several involve special events or volunteer programs and nearly all include donations or in-kind support from project partners, such as the Viva la Foothills! project described below.

The proposals selected for funding are:

Field Station/Project	Award
Spring Creek NFH/Two Aquatic Education Fin Bins	$ 493
Lower Columbia River FHC/Educational Supplies	494
Yreka FWO/Northwest Forest Plan/HCP Display	1000
Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR/Burrowing Owl Video	1000
Big Island NWRC/Modular Exhibit System	1000
Nevada FWO/Urban Wildlife Awareness	1000
Dworshak NFH/Salmon & Steelhead Sense CD-ROM	1000
Stillwater NWR/Spring Wings Bird Festival	1000
Sacramento FWO/Invasive Species Education Kit	1000
Snake River Basin FWO/Viva la Foothills!	1000
Modoc NWR/Migratory Bird Festival	1000
Carlsbad FWO/Palos Verdes Blue Butterfly	1000
Torrance Law Enforcement Office/Education Display Supplies	1000
Oregon Coast NWRC/Puffin Club Assistance	1000
Columbia NWR/The View of Nature	1000

NFH=National Fish Hatchery FHC=Fish Health Center
NWR or NWRC=National Wildlife Refuge (Complex)

Viva La Foothills!

Grant helps fund public effort

By Meggan Laxalt

The Snake River Basin Office in Boise, Idaho used its $1,000 outreach grant to help fund a month-long celebration aimed at increasing public understanding of the conservation challenges at the Boise Foothills, which were being "loved to death" by a variety of recreationists.

The Service, other agencies, conservationists, educators, natural resource specialists, private businesses, and many others joined forces and crafted a public awareness program to encourage conservation of this fragile habitat.

They also initiated "Viva la Foothills!", a month-long series of activities and events involving fun, educational, family-oriented activities, such as habitat restoration, wildflower walks, nature writing workshops, art activities, and a trails use survey to educate the public.

Photo by: USFWS

Viva La Foothills! helps children see nature and the environment differently.

Susan Saul is an outreach specialist in External Affairs; Meggan Laxalt is an information and education specialist at the Snake River Office.

More Upcoming Events

Kern Valley Vulture Festival

When: Sept. 29-Oct. 2
Where: Weldon, CA
Contact: 760/378-3044
http://frontpage.lightspeed.net/KRP/TVfield_trips.htm

Spring Creek NFH Open House

When: Sept.23-24
Where: Underwood, WA
Contact: Spring Creek NFH 509/493-1730

National Wildlife Refuge Week

When: Oct 8-15
Where: Nationwide
Contact: Susan Saul 503/872-2728

American River Salmon Festival

When: Oct.13-15
Where: Sacramento, CA
Contact: Bruce Foreman Dept. of Fish &Game 916/358-2353

THE MEDIA CORNER

Outfox the Opposition

Use the media to educate the public and build support

By Joan Jewett

When it comes to getting people's attention, there's no better ally than the media. What better way to spread the word about your issue, build interest, and promote support?

Rick Coleman, assistant regional director for External Affairs, offers a great story about how he "worked" the media to build strong support for protecting endangered California clapper rails by trapping predatory non-native red foxes at San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge.

He accomplished this in an region full of "animal lovers" who were not supportive of predator control. Coleman's success shows that an artful strategy and a clever media plan can build public involvement and support for a potentially controversial proposal.

Coleman was project leader of the refuge in the late 1980s, when he and other biologists documented a dramatic decline in the once-common marsh bird, the California clapper rail. Their research led them to the culprit, a thriving population of non-native red fox.

The red fox had been introduced to California in the late 1870s for fox hunting and fur trapping, then again after World War I to establish a fur farming industry. When fur farming failed, even more foxes were released. In the following decades the animals became well-established in the wild. They moved toward and penetrated San Francisco Bay's suburban border, gradually decimating the clapper rail population.

Coleman and his staff knew that the predominantly non-hunting Bay Area population wouldn't accept predator control unless they really understood the impact these non-native predators were having on this native, imperilled species.

Their strategy was to call the media. They couldn't offer reliable appearances of these secretive, drab-colored birds, so the staff built the birds' appeal by emphasizing their imperilled ecosystem. The public learned that the clapper rail's plight paralleled the demise of Bay Area marsh habitat. They also learned how habitat protection and restoration could help the struggling clapper rails, other species dependent upon an estuarine ecosystem — and humans.

"The public attended meetings and came out in full support of the Service's predator control plan."

The refuge staff built interest in the clapper rails for about a year, without ever really focusing on the red fox problem. When they did start talking about the red fox and its impact on clapper rails, the public rallied strongly in support of clapper rails.

Did the public object when the refuge proposed controlling red foxes to protect clapper rails? No! The public attended meetings and came out in full support of the Service's predator control plan.

The refuge staff continued to involve the media, using the clapper rail as a symbol of the disappearing natural environment, an all-too-apparent pattern to Bay Area residents. By the time the predator control program began, it had widespread support.

Take a page from Coleman's story the next time you're faced with building support for a proposal or designing a public involvement plan. Outfox the opposition. Develop relationships with reporters. Help them understand the bigger issue. Your may find that your best ally is the one you often view as a foe — the news media. O

Joan Jewett is chief of Public Affairs.

CASE STUDY

Changing a Public Use Program

Solid planning helps visitors adapt to access restrictions

By Yvette Donovan

"Once people are used to a certain level or type of access, it is very hard to take it away."

It contains only six letters and may be used with seemingly friendly words, such as accept and adapt; but often as not, the word "change" elicits fear and other strong emotions when used in reference to things that people hold dear.

At Ridgefield NWR in Washington, we learned a lot about people's feelings about change during the process of incorporating recommendations made by a Public Use Program Review Team following their on-site review. The team concluded what refuge staff had suspected for some time: The existing public use program resulted in too much wildlife disturbance and did not provide high quality wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities.

The team observed wildlife hazing and disturbance problems in response to jogging, unleashed dog walking, and unrestricted pedestrian access in critical habitat areas. Interpretive panels were outdated and in need of repair. While recently restored refuge habitat was flourishing, clearly the public use program was not.

The need to make changes was evident to achieve the goals of the refuge and NWR system. But how do you change a program the public likes when it has existed for so long? How do you persuade long time users who consider the refuge their own piece of paradise to accept the changes and adapt their behavior? Here's what we did to get off on the right foot:

Photo by: USFWS

New signs using humor help improve compliance with regulations.

- Sought advice from other refuges that had gone through a similar experience.
- Contacted local civic and government organizations, interest groups, and others to tell them what was happening and eliminate the element of surprise.
- Invited Congressional staff and private landowners on guided tours to hear the reasons behind the changes and our new approach to management.
- Held two public meetings and presented the Review Team recommendations for public comment.
- Sent out news releases announcing the new public use program. We followed up with phone calls to reporters who had previously worked with us. This yielded several articles on the issue both before and after the meetings.
- Worked with EPIC to design fun, friendly signs and posted them on the refuge. We also complemented the signage with a revised station brochure to reflect the new public use regulations.

We did the groundwork and hoped for the best, but eventually the inevitable happened. Most people appreciated the participation process, understood the need to change, and accepted it. But we also heard from several unhappy visitors who strongly voiced their displeasure and chose to disregard the new regulations.

Since then we've tracked where our worst problems are, beefed up informational and law enforcement contacts, and are trying to win the violators over one by one. We are also continuing to keep the public involved.

Our successful outreach program has reinforced a few important lessons: Be sure to involve the public before you make any changes. And think ahead if you are embarking on new visitor use programs: Once people are used to a certain level or type of access, it is very hard to take it away. O

Yvette Donovan is an outdoor recreation planner at Ridgefield NWR.

Timing and the Telephone

Use both to improve your interactions with stakeholders

By Tony Faast

Public participation is a key component of nearly every serious decision that the Fish and Wildlife Service makes these days. Our image and credibility, as professionals and as an agency, are on the line every time we invite stakeholders into our business. Every action, from adding a land parcel to the Refuge System to listing a species, defines the Service in the eyes of those who are affected by our decisions.

Timing is critical in public participation. Involve people too early and you may hear unrealistic ideas and create unmet expectations. Involve them too late, and they may feel "you've already made up you mind."

How do we make sure we're involving people in a way that works for them? I advocate the "Three Phone Call Rule!" Make phone calls to: 1) a known supporter of your action, 2) a potential adversary, and 3) someone like your mother-in-law! Use these three calls to learn about the community. How do they receive information? How do they currently participate? What is the perception of the Service's openness to input? Listen to what they say and adjust your process accordingly.

But what about those stakeholders who decline to be involved in your public participation process, yet show up in opposition to anything you try to do? Chris Gates, President of The National Civic League, characterizes these people as CAVEs and NOPEs ("Citizens Against Virtually Everything" and "Not On Planet Earth").

Our relationships with stakeholders should not be driven by fear of the CAVE people! Gates contends that a public participation process that strives to create public dialogue with space for legitimate public deliberation, where we actually listen and respond, will do much to restore trust in government, regardless of the outcome.

There will always be CAVE people and NOPEs, people taking extreme positions that we can't satisfy. But these people aren't the true barometer of a successful public participation process. Accept that they're there, use your three phone call rule to test your approaches, and hone the best listening and responding skills that you can so you are able to respond to people who have legitimate concerns.

Besides, your mother-in-law would be proud of you. O

Tony Faast is a staff biologist for the Division of Federal Aid.

"Our relationships with stakeholders should not be driven by fear of the CAVE people!"

TRAININGS & WORKSHOPS

Cispus Workshop: Training in Resource Management Communication Skills

Learn how to develop outreach and public involvement programs, conduct/manage meetings, and create successful teams. Visit http://cispus.r1.fws.gov/cispus

Where: Randle, WA
When: March 5-9, 2001. $350 (lodging, meals, and materials)
Contact: Susan Saul at (503/872-2728) or Tony Faast (503/231-6128).

Negotiation Strategies and Techniques

Offers the basics for negotiating/resolving conflicts and is a pre-requisite for the last course listed.

Where: Shepherdstown, WV
When: 10/11-12/00 Apply immediately!
Contact: Karen Cartlidge (304/876-1600)

Effective Facilitation

Teaches good skills to have for public meetings, meetings with partners, problem solving sessions, etc., even if you're not going to be the facilitator.

Where: Shepherdstown, WV
When: 3/5-8/01 Apply by 1/5/01
Contact: Karen Cartlidge (304/876-1600)

Resolving Complex Environmental Issues with Stakeholders: Lessons from the Field

Teaches advanced negotiation techniques and uses field examples as a basis for learning skills.

Where: Shepherdstown, WV
When: 5/7-11/01 Apply by 3/9/01
Contact: Karen Cartlidge (304/876-1600)

Participation…

Continued from Page 1

"The first step toward better government-citizen relations is to show that you have integrity and are trying to do things right."

- The public has a right to have a say in what their government does;
- The public might have something worthwhile to say that would be helpful to you and to your mission;
- You can help improve public perceptions and the actual workings of the Service; or
- It would be nice to leave your successor with a friendly local populace.

Drink a lot of coffee. When I was refuge supervisor for Idaho, Oregon, and Washington, I would often tell refuge managers to let their employees do the work while they drank coffee with the local folks. This usually got a positive outward response (good joke, right?), but most of them were uneasy with the idea.

But I wasn't joking. The coffee drinking actually represents two important concepts:

- The most meaningful public involvement is the ongoing, daily, informal, grassroots type that occurs before some crisis or new policy forces us to "go public."
- The most "bullet-proof" government actions are those that have developed solidly over time and don't draw attention because of controversy or a high profile.

Whether a problem occurs quickly or over a period of time, if you have been talking with your publics on an informal, friendly basis, you will have time to: 1) clarify your own thinking, 2) get some free early input, 3) get people used to the idea of change, and 4) receive some early reactions to the proposed change, which would then allow you to put forth the proposal in the least upsetting way.

One important caveat: You must be sure that you are "drinking coffee" with all your publics. If you only communicate with one group and ignore the others, you could be in for a big surprise.

Bring the bosses along. Use "coffee diplomacy" on your bosses and elected officials just as you do on a local agency or an Audubon chapter.

If they aren't threatened by your proposal, your chances of maintaining government integrity through and beyond the planning process are greatly increased.

Use the least "formal" process. If you need to go beyond "coffee diplomacy," you have many public participation options to ensure broad understanding and engender good input.

The methods least likely to get out of control but remain personal are: workshops, field trips, discussion groups, open houses, etc. Problems are solved one-on-one and two-on-two, not at public hearings or major media events.

Enlist your publics. If your "coffee diplomacy" and other interactions have worked, then you have a well-informed group of people who share ownership.

Don't be bashful about asking them to defend the plan and the process with your bosses and elected officials.

Don't take the blame. If your good public participation process is sabotaged in any way, your credibility is on the line: Tell your constituents exactly what happened. The first step toward better government-citizen relations is to show that you have integrity and are trying to do things right.

Maybe people can't trust "the government," but with planning and effort on your part, they should be able to trust the government's representatives. O

Sandy Wilbur formerly was refuge supervisor for Idaho, Oregon and Washington. Read his commentaries on public participation at www.netcom.com/~symbios/pubpartic.html

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